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BARON DE SAINT CASTIN

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BY

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The Bangor Historical Society and the Piscataquis Society held historical Field Days at Castine, Maine, July 14-15, 1915.

The exercises commenced in the evening of July 14, in Emerson Memorial Town Hall, where an address of welcome was made by Honorable W. A. Walker on behalf of the Castine Board of Trade. Responses were made by Honorable Henry Lord, President of the Bangor Society, and John Francis Sprague, President of the Piscataquis Society. Other speakers at these meetings were Mr. Charles W. Noyes, of New York, Dr. George A. Wheeler, and Mrs. Louise Wheeler Bartlett, of Castine, Honorable Frank E. Guernsey, of Dover, Mr. Edward M. Blanding, and Dr. William C. Mason, of Bangor, and Professor Warren R. Moorehead, of Andover, Mass.

Following is President Sprague's response on this occasion.

BARON JEAN VINCENT D'ABADDIE
DE SAINT CASTIN

RESPONSE BY MR. SPRAGUE

*Mr. President, Members of the Castine Board
of Trade, and of the Historical Societies,
Ladies and Gentlemen :*

Personally and especially in behalf of the Piscataquis Historical Society, I return to you and to the good people of old Castine our sincere thanks and appreciation of your hearty welcome and the many kindnesses and courtesies bestowed upon us to-day. This pleasant occasion will ever remain a sweet and agreeable memory in our minds through all of the future years.

Castine, deriving its name from one of the most interesting and picturesque characters that the annals of the rise and fall of New France in the New World discloses, is assuredly a mecca for all who are interested in the real story of the earliest Colonial life on the coast of Maine and who

love its mystery and its romance. We stand at this hour upon one of the most historic spots on the American continent. Here we may glance back through the vistas of time to that period when by wars and revolutions a new spirit of nationalism was awakening in both England and France ; when England was evolving from a community of agriculturists to a great empire of makers and merchants ; when each was bursting through the narrow confines of mediæval Europe. And this awakening in the Old World, in the sixteenth century, evolved a wonderful class of men, brave, defiant and far-seeing ; part statesmen and part pirates and wholly daring adventurers ; the forerunners of England's chartered stock companies which followed in the beginning of her commercial greatness. Historians have called this the Elizabethan age. In the last days of the sixteenth century France had emerged from thirty years of conflict and turmoil which was followed by the assassination of Henry III and the ascension to the throne of Henry IV, "the

Knight of the White Plume," who for sixteen years had been King of Navarre. He became the rightful King in 1589, but it was not until 1594 that his seat was secure from the intrigues and armed attempts of his enemies to dethrone him. He was one of the greatest of European rulers of that age and although born a Protestant he later embraced the Catholic faith but believed fully in religious freedom. His cardinal principles of government were that France should maintain the hereditary rights of monarchy ; that the Catholics should be in the majority in his councils ; that there should be absolute peace between the Catholics and Protestants and complete religious liberty for both. And as a result of this we see him sending forth Champlain a Catholic and DeMonts a Protestant united as explorers and making the first American settlement on our Maine coast in Passamaquoddy Bay, June 24, 1604.

A century had passed since Columbus had revealed America to the world. Commerce stirring in France as in the whole of

Europe was aroused from the sleep of feudalism. The ocean and its mysteries began to fascinate the human mind and navigation was the attraction of the brave and ambitious.

Henry the Fourth encouraged and fostered this spirit of adventure and desire to establish a new France in America and rival England in colonial enterprises. And for a century the coast of Maine was the scene of much of the great struggle that ensued between the Anglo Saxon and the Latin for supremacy in America.

Historians have handed down to us some recorded facts regarding this land of St. Castin. But its prelude, its shrouded background is Norumbega, ever appearing upon history's pages but never explained, never real yet always existing. Its fame attracted hardy and bold explorers, missionaries and adventurers, and its bewildering tales fascinated the European mind. It was a magnificent dream. An alluring phantom never chased to its lair. It was the will-o'-the-wisp of Maine's colonial history. And

it was here on the banks of the ancient Pentagoet and in its vast forest wilds where fable and romance, more often than in any other place, located the golden city with its wondrous walls of pearls, its riches and its splendor. That these marvelous tales aided greatly in stimulating emigration to America is indisputable. But those who followed the rays of this Norumbega rainbow found only a coast of grandeur, the huts of savages and wild forestry. And as we to-day sail down the grand old Penobscot, flowing from out the vast wilderness country around and beyond Chesuncook, and from its thousands of lakes and its legion of brooks and ponds making its way to the sea, we may not behold that city of wonder with its houses upheld by pillars of silver and crystal, or the "mountain of silver," or any of the glow of a barbaric splendor which lived in European imagination for more than fifty years during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But we may know and fully realize that we are on ground made sacred by the footprints of Champ-

lain and other early explorers, who were the fathers of American colonization.

While we would pass with haste these rugged characters and d'Aulney and LaTour and their compeers, we fain would tarry for a brief moment in a retrospect of Baron Jean Vincent D'Abaddie St. Castin, who made such a deep impress upon the times in which he lived and whose name is so indelibly interwoven with some of the most important events in our colonial history. It is not for us to know very much of his career. Accurate history, however, presents him as a bold personage yet liberal and tolerant for the age in which he lived. He had no prejudice against the red men but affiliated with them and finally married a daughter of Madocawando, one of the noblest of the Indian chieftains of the Penobscot tribe. Maine's own poet, Longfellow, one of the world's sweetest singers, loved the lore and the legends and traditions of ancient Maine history. The tragedy of Father Rale, the Indian battles and his early memories of the woods, the rivers

and lakes and the sea coast and the bays of Maine, enthralled him. Nowhere upon the pages of American literature appears anything more delightful than his story in rhyme of the Baron St. Castin. He tells how this young man of noble family educated and cultured left his baronial home in the beautiful country of the Pyrenees in sunny France, "And sailed across the western seas," in quest of fortune and adventure in the New World of marvel and mystery. He draws the pathetic picture of "His father, lonely, old and gray" sitting alone by his fireside mourning the absence of his beloved son and longing for his return. We see the holy father of the church calling on the aged sire and offering him consolation :

" Ah yes, dear friend ! in our young days
We should have liked to hunt the deer
All day amid those forest scenes,
And to sleep in the tents of the Tarratines ;
But now it is better sitting here
Within four walls, and without the fear
Of losing our hearts to Indian queens ;

For man is fire and woman is tow,
And the Somebody comes and begins to blow."

Then a fatal letter "wings its way" and
he learns that "the young Baron of St.
Castin,"

"Swift as the wind is and as wild,
Has married a dusky Tarratine,
Has married Madocawando's child!"

"For many a year the old chateau lies
tenantless and desolate" until one bright
day the good Curate is seen speeding
"along the woodland way" humming gayly

"No day is so long
But it comes at last to vesper-song.'
He stops at the porter's lodge to say
That at last the Baron of St. Castine
Is coming home with his Indian queen,
Is coming without a week's delay;
And all the house must be swept and clean
And all things set in good array!
And the solemn porter shakes his head;
And the answer he makes is: "Lackaday!
'We will see, as the blind man said!'"

With what feelings of fear and trepidation the father looked forward to the coming of the wild daughter of the dusky Penobscots ! He looked "to see a painted savage stride

"Into the room, with shoulders bare,
And eagle feathers in her hair,
And around her a robe of panther's hide."

"Instead, he beholds with secret shame
A form of beauty undefined,
A loveliness without a name,
Not of degree, but more of kind ;
Nor bold nor shy, nor short nor tall,
But a new mingling of them all.
Yes, beautiful beyond belief,
Transfigured and transfused, he sees
The lady of the Pyrenees,
The daughter of the Indian chief.
Beneath the shadow of her hair
The gold-bronze color of the skin
Seems lighted by a fire within,
As when a burst of sunlight shines
Beneath a sombre grove of pines,—
A dusky splendor in the air.
The two small hands, that now are pressed
In his, seem made to be caressed,

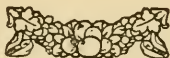
They lie so warm and soft and still,
Like birds half hidden in a nest,
Trustful, and innocent of ill.
And ah! he cannot believe his ears
When her melodious voice he hears
Speaking his native Gascon tongue;
The words she utters seem to be
Part of some poem of Goudouli,
They are not spoken, they are sung!
And the Baron smiles, and says, "You see,
I told you but the simple truth;
Ah, you may trust the eyes of youth!"

"The Baron Castine of St. Castin" and his beautiful Indian queen are finally completely welcomed at the old home and fire-side, but not until after they had been "wed as Christians wed," for the crude wedding which had united them on the banks of old Pentagoet, under the shade of the hemlock and fir, did not fully meet with the approbation of the church.

"And things" with them finally came "to a happy end."

"The choir is singing the matin song,
The doors of the church are opened wide,

The people crowd, and press, and throng
To see the bridegroom and the bride.
They enter and pass along the nave ;
They stand upon the father's grave ;
The bells are ringing soft and slow ;
The living above and the dead below
Give their blessing on one and twain ;
The warm wind blows from the hills of Spain,
The birds are building, the leaves are green,
And Baron Castine of St. Castine
Hath come at last to his own again."

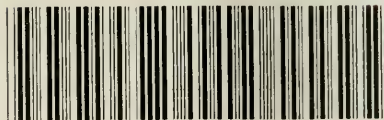


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